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ABSTRACT

In spring 1984, as part of a larger study of transfer education in urban community colleges, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges conducted a survey to analyze faculty involvement in the transfer function. A questionnaire was distributed to 444 randomly selected faculty members teaching transfer courses at 24 colleges, requesting information on faculty awareness of student characteristics, faculty interaction with students, how faculty prepare students for the four-year college environment, faculty involvement in transfer-related activities, and faculty attitudes toward transfer and other community college functions. Study findings, based on a 78% response rate, included the following: (1) 67% of the instructors did not have information on student transfer aspirations, 81% had no information on performance on basic skills tests, and 80% had no information on students' employment status; (2) 61% met with students during office hours, yet very few indicated communication with students in other settings; (3) 45% did not use essay exams at all in determining course grades; (4) most faculty engaged in a variety of activities to achieve course equivalency between community colleges and senior institutions; (5) most faculty were not greatly involved in formal transfer activities outside the classroom, but many were involved in less formal ways; and (6) only 19% agreed that the primary function of the community college should be transfer. The study findings suggested that lack of faculty involvement in the transfer function was due to the perception by faculty that transfer education was the domain of administrative personnel, and that transfer education had become a secondary function. (LAL)

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# COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY AND THE TRANSFER FUNCTION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Educational Resources Information Center
ERIC DIGEST
University of California, Los Angeles

August 1985

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# COMMUNITY COLLEGE FACULTY AND THE TRANSFER FUNCTION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Community college faculty have an opportunity to affect and promote the transfer function. However, data from a recent study suggests that outside of regular classroom instruction most faculty do not make major contributions to the support and maintenance of the transfer function. Though the data have their limitations, the study raises questions about faculty involvement in the transfer function and the degree to which their involvement is an expected part of their work. This ERIC Digest reviews the findings of the study and discusses implications.

## THE STUDY: SURVEYING THE FACULTY

During Spring 1984, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges surveyed 444 randomly selected faculty members teaching transfer courses at 24 colleges participating in the Ford Foundation's Urban Community College Transfer Opportunities Program. The survey instrument assessed faculty awareness of student characteristics, faculty interaction with students, how faculty prepare students for the four-year college environment, faculty involvement in transfer-related activities, and faculty attitudes towards transfer and other community college functions. Of the 444 surveys distributed, 347 usable responses were returned for a total response rate of 78 percent. The sample included only faculty who teach transferable courses.

## FACULTY AWARENESS OF STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

The survey asked faculty what they know about their students' education and career expectations, academic backgrounds, and employment experiences. Surprisingly, the data ran counter to the expectations of the study. Although almost half of the respondents indicated that they were aware of their students' degree plans, the majority did not have information on student transfer aspirations (67%), performance on basic skills tests (81%), and employment status (80%). It was expected that faculty would be aware of these things, the study noted, as community colleges pride themselves on showing concern for the individual student.

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## FACULTY INTERACTION WITH STUDENTS

How often do faculty communicate with students outside of the classroom? The study explored this question by soliciting information on the frequency with which faculty interact with students in both formal and informal settings. While a high proportion of the respondents reported that they meet with students during office hours (61 percent), very few indicated that they communicate with students in other settings. Only 14 percent indicated that they are actively involved in orientation presentations for new students; seven percent indicated that meet with students for lunch or coffee; and only three percent indicated that they frequently invite students to their homes.

The study, then , leads to the hypothesis that outside of the classroom and scheduled office hours, community college transfer students have very few opportunities to interact with faculty.

## DO FACULTY PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT OF SENIOR COLLEGES?

The study also provides some insight into how faculty prepare students to compete academically at the senior institution. Specifically, two questions were investigated: Are class assignments and tests rigorous? Do faculty strive to make their courses equivalent with those offered at four-year institutions?

In one part of the survey, faculty were asked about evaluation techniques used to determine final course grades. Fifty-two percent of the faculty indicated that one-fourth or more of the student's final grade is based on performance on quick-score, objective tests. In contrast, only 27 percent of the respondents indicated that essay tests represent more than a quarter of the student's course grade. Moreover, 45 percent reported that they did not use essay exams at all.

Regarding course equivalency between community colleges and senior institutions, the survey reveals that faculty have engaged in a variety of activities to achieve comparability in format, content, and requirements. These activities include comparing community college course syllabi with the syllabi of senior colleges (67 percent), comparing textbooks used for courses (83 percent), comparing required assignments (60 percent), and comparing examination methods (45 percent). These figures are encouraging. But in light of the low proportion of faculty who utilize rigorous evaluation techniques, it can be hypothesized that faculty place greater emphasis on transferable course content than on transferable student skills.

## FACULTY INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSFER-RELATED ACTIVITIES

Study data show that faculty are not greatly involved in formal transfer activities outside of the classroom. Seventy- nine percent of the faculty reported that they have not been involved in organizing student visits to four-year colleges; 75 percent have not served on committees to develop

articulation agreements with four-year colleges; and 83 percent have not invited a member of the faculty of a senior college to speak about transfer opportunities to their students.

On the other hand, faculty seem to be more actively involved in less formal ways. For instance, 78 percent indicated that they had written a letter of recommendation in support of student transfer applications, and 49 percent reported that they had followed-up on individual students who transferred to senior colleges.

## FACULTY ATTITUDES TOWARDS TRANSFER AND OTHER COMMUNITY COLLEGE FUNCTIONS

Attitudes held by the majority of the respondents do not represent a strong mandate for increased attention to transfer education. While 53 percent agreed with the statement that students will have a greater sense of accomplishment if they earn the baccalaureate degree, only 19 percent agreed that the primary function of the community college should be to prepare students for transfer. Other questions revealed the following: 19 percent agreed that the best indicator of a community college's effectiveness is the proportion of its freshmen who go on to earn the baccalaureate; 22 percent agreed that community colleges would have to de-emphasize some of their other functions in order to strengthen the transfer curriculum; 50 percent agreed that the primary function of the community college should be life-long education; and 68 percent agreed that community colleges have to expand occupational and vocational programs in areas of high demand in order to attract students. These responses indicate that faculty are apt to favor college functions that are more marketable.

## IMPLICATIONS

The faculty represent one of the most valuable resources the community college can marshall in support of the transfer function. And, indeed, the faculty role in providing instruction in transfer courses should not be minimized. However, the study shows that many faculty apparently do not make major contributions in support of the transfer function: they are less aware of student characteristics than expected; faculty-student interaction is limited to primarily formal avenues; faculty rely more heavily on objective tests than essay exams; faculty are not greatly involved in specific transfer activities, and the majority of faculty do not envision transfer as the primary function of community colleges.

The study suggests two possible reasons for this lack of faculty involvement: 1) that transfer education is perceived as the exclusive domain of administrative personnel, especially in areas of student services, and 2) that transfer education has become a secondary function. If this is so, the noted absence of faculty contribution towards the advancement of transfer related goals may be a manifestation of faculty awareness that such efforts are only of limited value, and may also contradict new institutional priorities.

The purpose of the Urban Community College Transfer Opportunities Program was to strengthen transfer education in selected urban community colleges. The brief profile of the UCCTOP faculty suggests that a reaffirmation of institutional committment to transfer education is imperative.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The full study report should be consulted for further information on the survey:

Cohen, A.M., Brawer, F.B., and Bensimon, E.M. Transfer Education in American Community Colleges. Los Angeles, CA: Center for the Study of Community Colleges, 1985. ( ED 255 250 )

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